pheromones enable the female to determine if he is a suitable mate.

It's the "no cologne, no date" theory of moth mating, and biologist Thomas Eisner at Cornell University has described one of the most intriguing examples in Florida's ornate moth. This is the promiscuous female-toxic-male relationship mentioned earlier. The caterpillars of this moth feed on a type of pea plant rich in an alkaloid toxin. This toxin, though powerful enough to kill a cow, is harmless to moths. They use it as a deterrent to birds and other predators.

But the really intriguing thing discovered by Eisner and his coworkers is that, when it comes time to mate, the female judges the male's desirability by how much of this poison he's accumulated. And the way that she tells is from his cologne. The nastier he smells, it seems, the more she likes him.

But it gets even better: she'll mate with a half-dozen or so suitably toxic males. Each of these lucky guys puts about 11 percent of his body mass into the sperm package. Eisner and his associate Craig LaMunyon discovered, however, that only one of the males actually gets to fertilize the eggs. After copulation, the female determines which one, usually by selecting the largest sperm package. The other males get cuckolded. She uses the toxins they've given to her as nuptial gifts to anoint her eggs against predators.

It may be some consolation, if only to this writer, to know that male moths actually derive some benefit from carrying around all those toxins. It's not just energy spent in the cause of unrequited love. The plant poisons also protect the moths themselves: the scent of these moths is so distasteful that spiders actually cut the moths out of their webs and set them free. Plant toxins have the added effect of discouraging bats, the one significant hazard to night-flying moths.

Wagner, McFarland and any other moth lover will sooner or later mutter dark and politically incorrect sentiments about bats, which linger around their black lights picking off moths. P.B.M. Allen, a British naturalist who wrote on the sybaritic joys of mothing, once confessed to being so maddened by the sight of a pipistrelle seizing a prize moth that he got out his shotgun and blasted the bat into eternity. (Afterward, in a moment of horrified remorse, it occurred to him how threadbare the countryside would be if the birds, bats and other predators weren't out there busily keeping the moths and their caterpillars in check.)

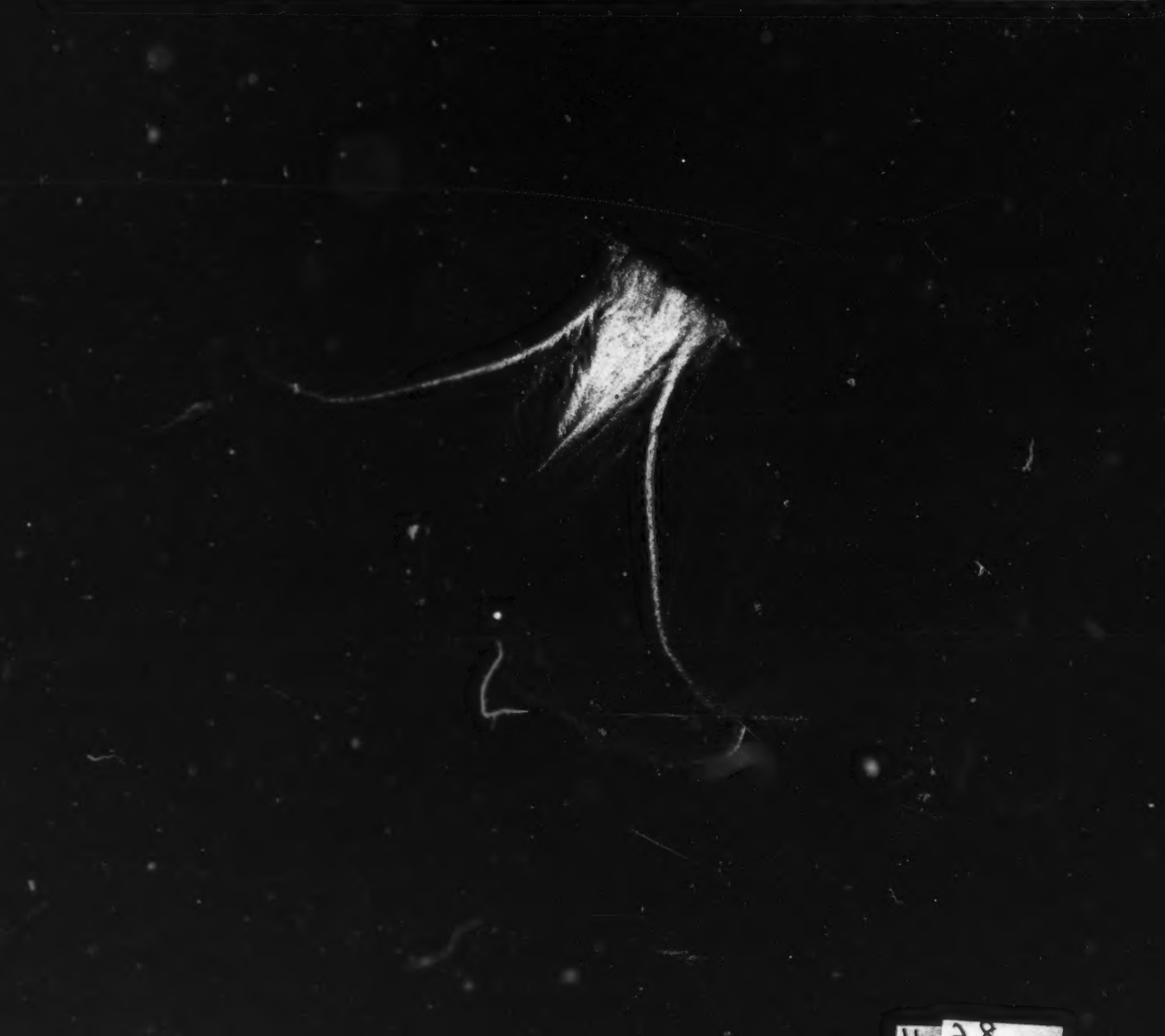
But the moths are far from being defenseless against bats. They have evolved ears, enabling a moth to hear the bat's radar signals from 100 feet off—as much as ten seconds before the bat even knows the moth is there. With visions of gaping mouths and needle-teeth dancing in its head, the moth flies away. If a bat gets close enough to race in for the kill, the moth can also hear the crescendo of ultrasonic shrieking. It may still save itself by folding its wings and making a last-ditch plunge.

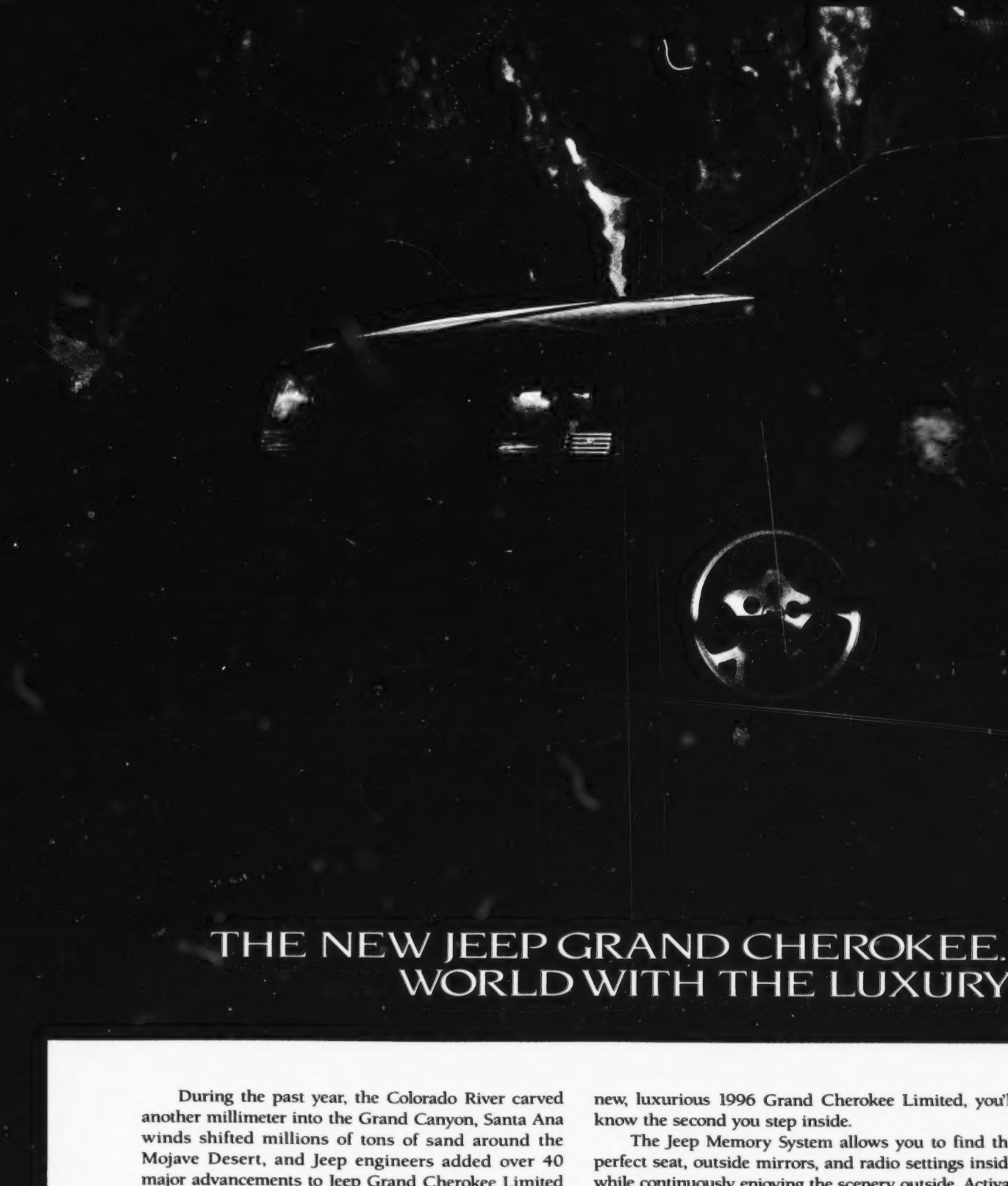
It is a dogfight out there in the evening sky. Some moths even send out ultrasonic signals of their own, and

Luna moth drapes its four-inch wingspread across a bed of phlox. It's believed the mock eyes deter predators.

researchers used to think the moths were jamming the bat's radar. But most now believe these moths are simply advertising the poisons they have picked up from their host plants. The bat gets the message, which roughly translated is: "I taste rotten."

By the time I got back to my own yard in Connecticut, after visiting with Wagner and McFarland, it no longer seemed like the same place. I went to bed feeling like a boy who knows that his toy soldiers will begin to march the moment he closes his eyes for the night. Outside my window, the slender twigs on the ash tree would suddenly come to life and walk off on caterpillar legs. Strange poisons would ride the air in the causes of love and self-defense. Fragments of bark would take wing. Fallen leaves would rise back up to the treetops, and a million bird droppings would be reincarnated as lepidoptera. By night, my yard now belonged, as it always has and probably always will, to the moths.





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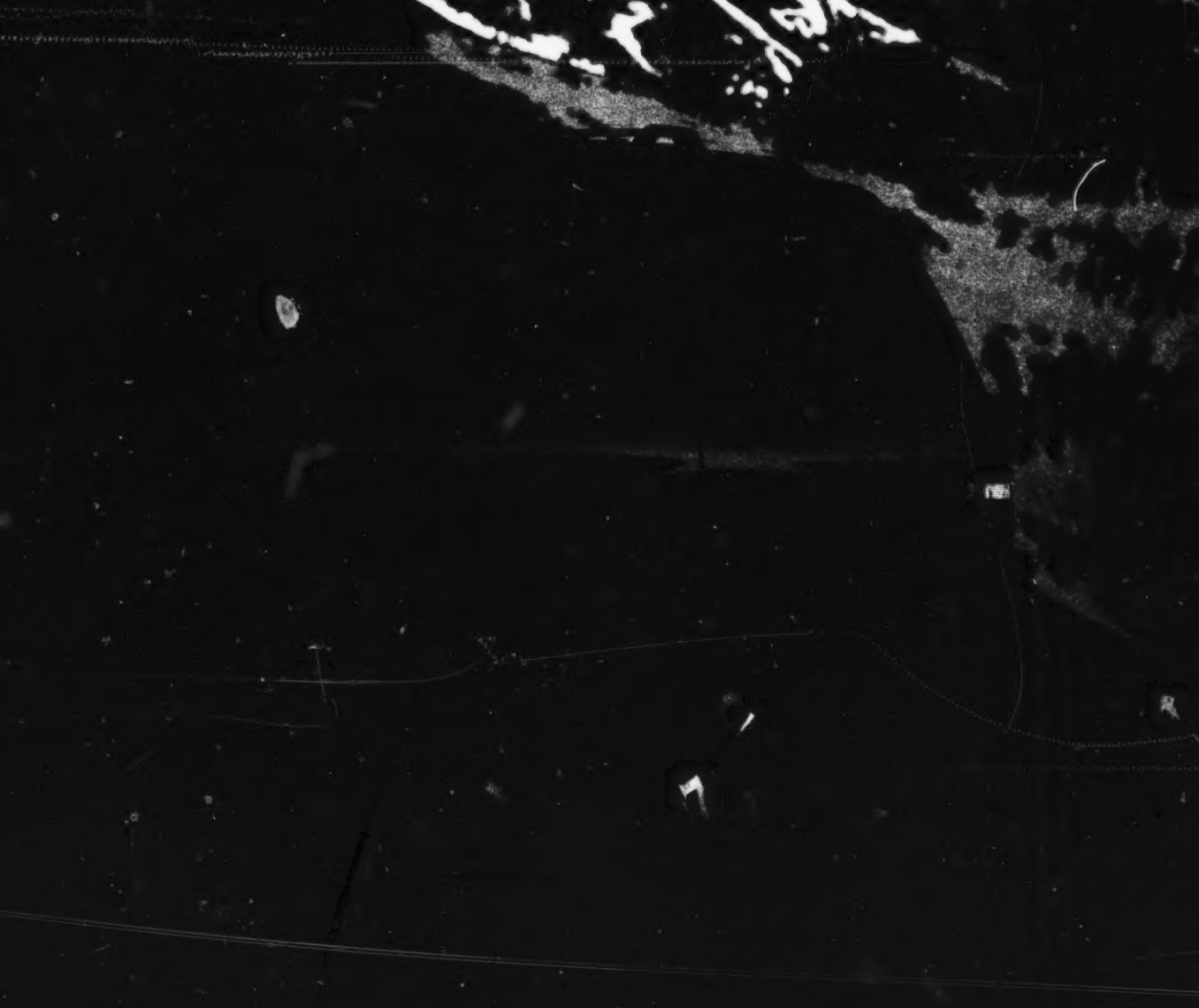

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1630

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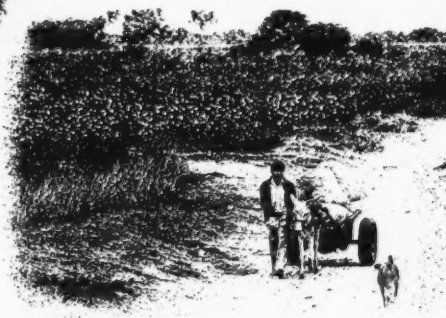

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1637

Rediscovering an Idaho photographer

From 1895 to 1912 in her Pocatello studio, Benedicte Wrensted produced telling portraits of Northern Shoshone and Bannock Indians

In the fall of 1984, Smithsonian anthropologist Joanna Cohan Scherer made a startling discovery. In search of photographs for the Institution's *Handbook of North American Indians*, she had ventured into the cluttered confines of the Bannock County Historical Society in Pocatello, Idaho. Straining to view an array of vintage portraits of Northern Shoshone and Bannock (Sho-Ban) Indians, she was amazed to find two familiar images. They were, in fact, identical to two portraits she had found earlier that year in a collection of 148 unidentified glass negatives at the National Archives. The Bannock County images bore the imprint "B. Wrensted, Pocatello." And who was B. Wrensted? Scherer was determined to find out. So began ten years of painstaking detective work. Scherer consulted tribal elders from the nearby Fort Hall Indian Reservation, wrote countless letters and scoured libraries, museums and private collections. She checked business directories and census records from the turn of the century, devoured issues of the *Pocatello Tribune* spanning 20 years, conducted interviews and journeyed to Denmark, Wrensted's birthplace. As a result, a little-known woman photographer named Benedicte Wrensted has emerged from obscurity—bringing to light a priceless visual legacy. An exhibit of Wrensted's work is now touring the country and will be at the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial in St. Louis, Missouri, from February 3 to April 30.

Noted for her evocative handling of natural light and the painterly quality of her images—such as the 1897 portrait of two unidentified Sho-Ban dancers (left)—Wrensted was cited in 1901 as an "artist of talent and attainment." But wider acclaim eluded her, and her photographs were rarely published. Most were taken home by her customers—cowboys, school groups, and families and individuals from Pocatello and Fort Hall. "What sets Wrensted's work apart," says Scherer, "is her skill in portraying the humanity—the individuality—of the people who posed for her. She captured their presence with a dignity and beauty that transcend time and place."

Diane M. Bolz

1634

Portrait of Logan Appenay, a Bannock, in Grass Dance regalia exemplifies the evocative imagery that was often misused to reinforce the Noble Savage stereotype.

Photograph of Jack Edmo (standing, left), Joe Warren (far right) and two unidentified Bannock men illustrates range of Indian apparel—from chaps to breechcloths.

Sho-Ban girl, a member of the Soyouma family, wears transitional type of attire: cloth with cowrie shells, metal sequins, square-cut sleeves.

Scherer was able to identify about 85 percent of Wrensted's subjects. Here, Eddy Drink, a Wind River Shoshone (circa 1910), sports cowboy garb.

16316

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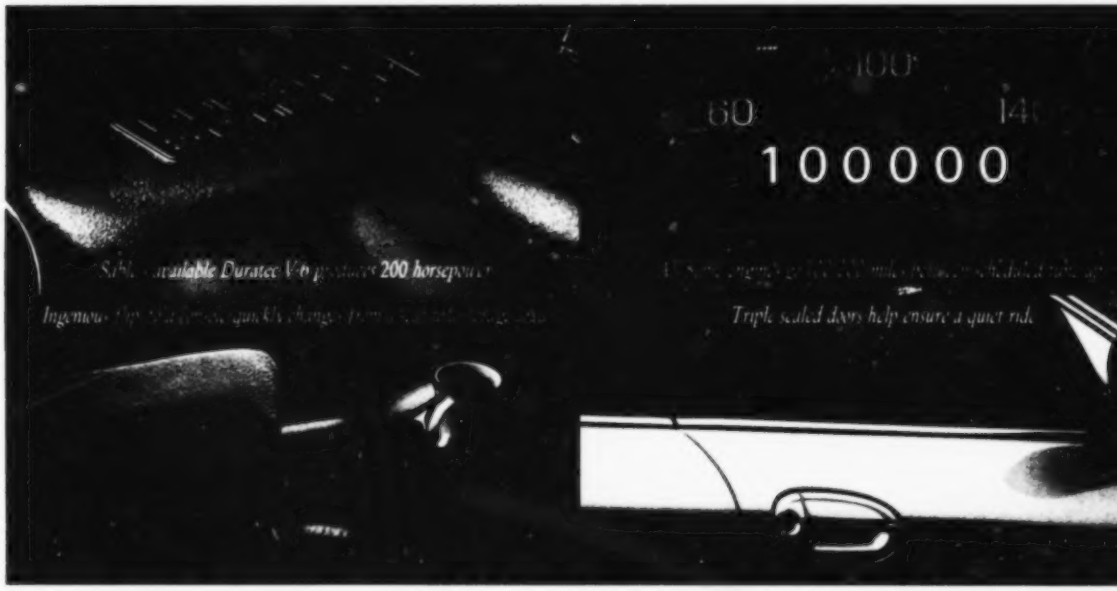

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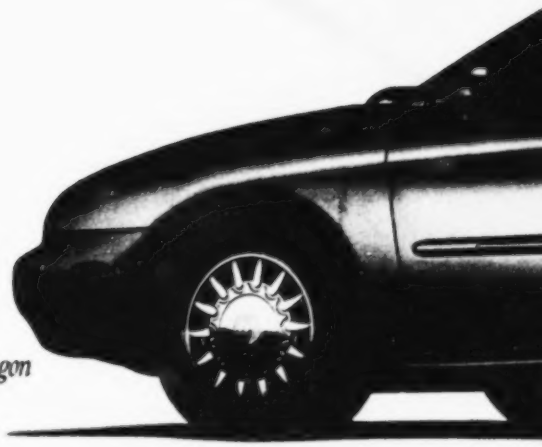

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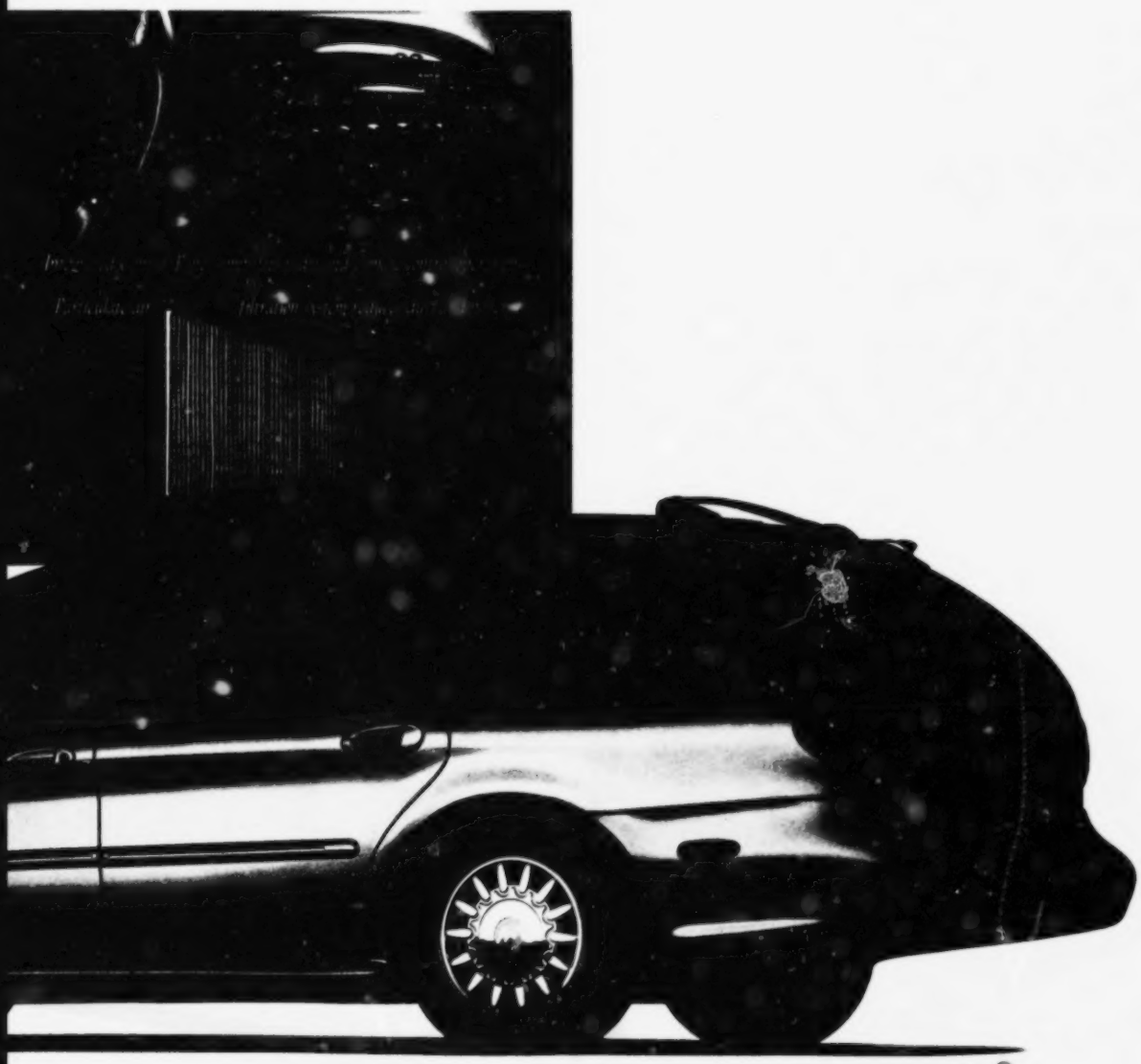

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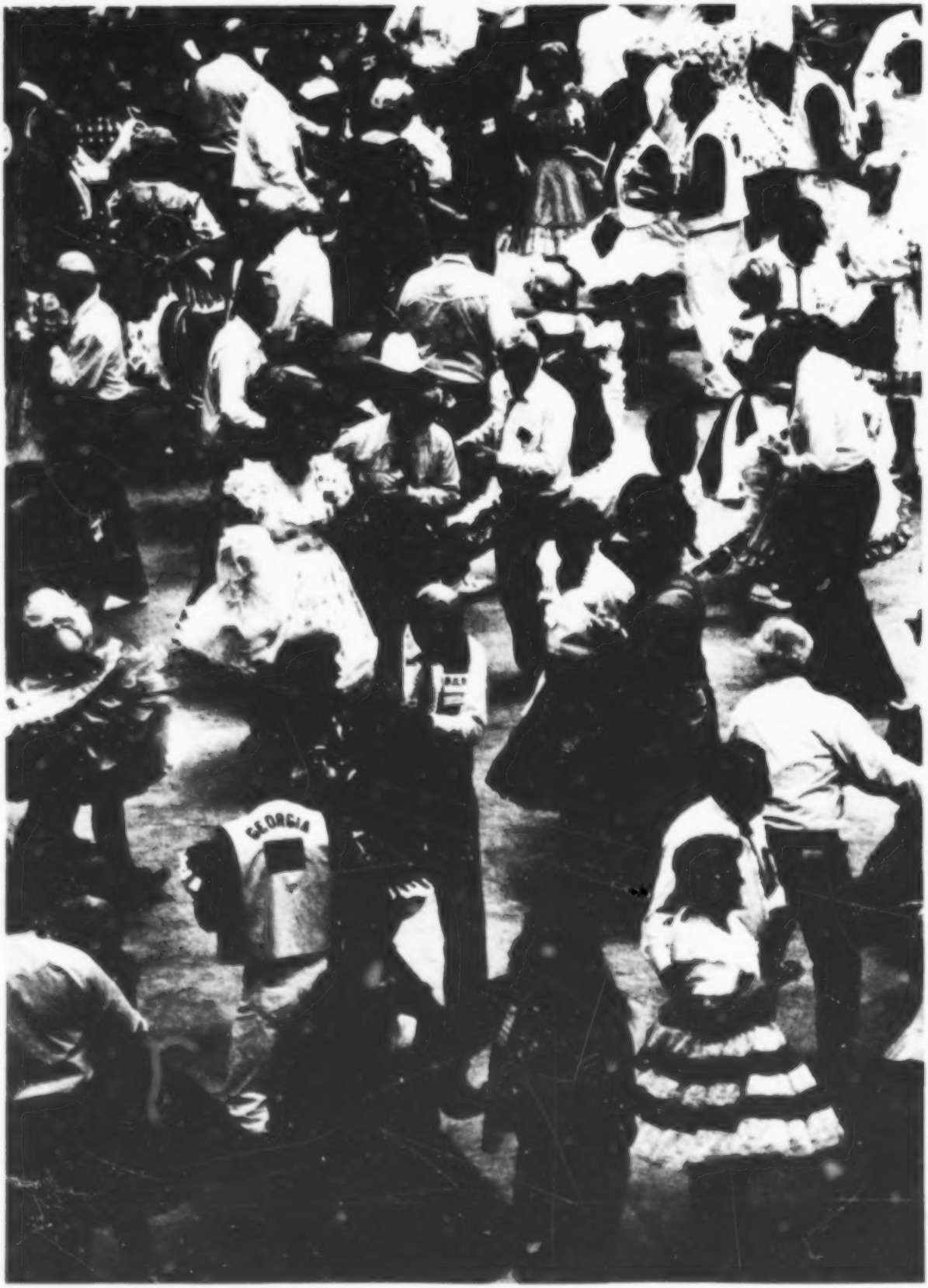

GEORGIA

By Sue Hubbell

Farewell 'Do-si-do,' hello 'Scoot and counter...Percolate!'

In modern Western square dancing, you still see lots of petticoats and legs, but there are new calls, new steps and new rules

A dancer at Fosters Outback in the Missouri Ozarks flourishes ruffled petticoat. It's called "skirt work."

The 44th National Square Dance Convention, billed as "The World's Greatest Square Dancing Event," has been in full swing at the Civic Center in Birmingham, Alabama, for four days now. I find myself here as the result of a humiliation so deep I should be ashamed to reveal it in a national publication. Nevertheless, I'll start at the beginning. One Saturday evening when my husband and I were at our farm in the Missouri Ozarks, he suggested we go square dancing. He'd seen a dance advertised at a place called Fosters Outback somewhere near the town of Willow Springs. Why not? We'd learned to square dance in gym class long ago. Hadn't everyone? Couldn't we do-si-do? He put on a T-shirt and jeans. I put on a T-shirt and denim skirt and slipped into the bowling shoes that I always go dancing in because they have slick soles and jingle bells.

We drove and drove over increasingly narrow gravel roads until we came to Larry's Autobody. In back of it was a big metal building surrounded by pickup trucks. We paid the entry fee and there, inside, was a brightly lighted wooden dance floor and a snack bar with an old-fashioned portable 45 rpm record player blaring bubble-gum rock and a caller who turned out to be Larry Foster himself. The 50 or so dancers were all dressed in costume. The men wore fancy Western outfits with shirts cut from material to match their wives' skirts. The women wore ruffled peasant blouses with puffed sleeves, knee-length skirts held aloft by elaborate petticoats, lacy pettipants and high-heeled dancing shoes. Both men and women jingled with strings of metal badges from festivals, conventions and other clubs at which they had danced.

We joined in a square that was just beginning to form. Larry launched into a singsong call that had very little do-si-do in it, and we promenaded not at all. We hadn't the least notion of what we were to do and immediately snarled the dancing pattern. The others began pushing us through, first in amusement, but only at first. Panting, ashamed, badly dressed, we sat down and waited until a waltz was put on the record player before sneaking back out onto the dance floor. At the break, Reda Foster, Larry's wife, came over, kindly greeted us and explained that what we had learned to do in gym class was a modified version of traditional square dancing and that this was "modern Western square dancing."

The traditional kind, I was to learn, was performed, casually and in whatever dress one wanted, to the compelling rhythm of real fiddle music. In it, the first couple danced through a pattern while the other three couples waited their turns in the square. The caller was usually an amateur, often one of the musicians or even one of the dancers. The dance moves were easy to learn simply by watching.

Modern Western square dancing, although related to the traditional kind, is more complicated. Thousands of

Partners promenade around their squares at last summer's national convention in Birmingham, Alabama.

Photographs by Maggie Steber

1640

standardized steps and complex patterns are involved. All eight dancers, costumed according to a dress code, dance simultaneously. The music ranges from 1940s pop tunes to rock'n'roll to "God Bless America." Almost always played from 45 rpm records, it is basically for background and rhythm. The dancers respond primarily to the directions of the caller, who is usually a well-paid professional.

We had stumbled onto a whole new universe there in the dark Ozark evening at the end of a gravel road, a universe filled with people in special clothes doing special things I did not know about, and I was consumed with curiosity.

I was to discover that there are 375,000 people who belong to modern Western square dancing clubs in this country, and still more abroad. There are national and international organizations, including the United Square Dancers of America, which offers its 322,000 members an organizational focus and voice, plus educational materials, insurance and credit card services. There are also national and international events, including the one that has led me, with some stops in between, here to Birmingham.

One evening I take Joan Iverson and James Ventenbergs out to a celebratory dinner. They are grandparents from Seattle who will be married at the convention the next day, right after the demonstration by the Alabama Connection Cloggers, under the spotlights on the stage in the auditorium at the Civic Center. They met square dancing, courted square dancing and want to be married square dancing, surrounded by the thousands of dancing friends who have come to this convention.

Modern Western square dancing, also sometimes called club or federation square dancing, is performed at a variety of levels. James and Joan, a former member of the San Francisco Ballet, dance at the top level, called Challenge. After dinner I follow them into a hotel ballroom assigned to Challenge dancers, where I sit down and watch.

There are five squares of eight people each. At measured pace, their faces as fixed and intense as those of tango dancers, they follow the orders given to the "boys" and "girls," as dancers of whatever age are known, by a famous father-and-son caller team, Lee and Steve Kopman. A typical call might be just a phrase: "Unwrap the diamond," for instance. "Scoot and counter." Or, more simply, "Percolate."

Callers are the stars of modern Western square dancing; top callers can make up to $5,000 in a weekend. They choreograph a dance to bring all four couples in each square simultaneously into complex and new positions, relative to one another, and then resolve the

Among dancers at Birmingham convention are (from left) a Japanese couple; Ida Bye and Peaches from Coon Rapids, Minnesota; and an amorous pair of Texans in attire promoting the '96 convention in San Antonio.

pattern by bringing them back to their starting positions.

For the dancers it is a puzzle to be solved, for only the callers know what's going to happen ahead of time. There is an occasional whoop or frisky step, but for the most part the dancing is so deliberate that it reminds me of a chess game. Sometimes, though, callers do "singing" calls. These consist of set dance directions matched to a piece of music. Singing calls make for a more flowing dance because practiced dancers remember them and can directly anticipate the next steps.

James, a thoughtful aerospace engineer, told me at dinner that the pleasure of dancing at the Challenge level is intellectual, that the dancers must know hundreds of patterns and thousands of variations on them and must respond instantly to a caller's coded phrases. "At any time," he said, "you have to keep in mind all the possibilities for the next move."

Some of the dancers in other ballrooms at the Civic Center call Challenge dancers "level snobs." They claim that they have more fun dancing at Mainstream or Plus, the first and second levels. I watch the dancers in those halls, and it is indeed true that they seem to be a jolly lot. But their pace is also a sedate one, giving time enough for a wheelchair dancer to allemande smartly around one of the squares. (Modern Western square dancers encourage handicapped individuals, who are known to them as "handicapable," to join in the fun.) But even to qualify for the Mainstream level, a couple will need at least 20 weeks of lessons (60 hours in all) to learn the basic 68 calls. Each additional level requires more lessons.

Whatever their level of achievement, modern Western square dancers are devoted. Many of the people I met at the convention dance three evenings a week, as do Joan and James, some even more. For most, their friendships and social life come from dancing.

The convention is planned by a self-perpetuating executive committee made up of previous convention chairmen. It is part trade show, part business meeting, part shopping mall, part reunion of old dancing friends. It is a convention marketer's dream: a gathering of affluent people who don't drink and get rowdy. (Drinking is forbidden by custom not only at the convention but at local club dances and smaller festivals.) One day is devoted to spirited bidding by various cities for the privilege of hosting the following year's event. The bidding is extremely competitive because the convention is such a lucrative prize. With some 13,700 dancers in town this year, Birmingham hopes to realize something in the neighborhood of $10 million.

Modern Western square dancing may be wholesome and good for the economy, but not all that long ago its

Alabama is well represented by three members of the Clayton Swingers Club; Guatemalan-American couple (middle) is from Maryland; Detroit partners are among some 500 black dancers from all over the country.

1647

Ozark fiddler Bob Holt has played fast and strong for four generations of traditional square dancers.

precursor, traditional square dancing, was considered so sinful in some parts of New England and the South that it was banned. That was due partly to its physicality and partly to the accompanying fiddle music, which was thought to be so sexually arousing that the fiddle was commonly referred to as the "Devil's box."

One day I asked Vera Toll, a woman in her 90s who lives near my farm in Missouri, if she square danced when she was young. "Oh my land!" she replied. "That's all we had to do. The dances were held in houses because some of the church people were against them. It was because of the fiddle music."

LeeEllen Friedland, a Washington, D.C. folklorist, has been gathering material on the history of square dancing for 20 years for a forthcoming book. She once asked some older dancers what they had done while they were waiting their turns. "They said that they had flirted and held hands," Friedland told me, "and that they didn't mind *that* at all!"

Gordon McCann is a native Ozarker who knows a lot about square dancing around Springfield, Missouri, where he is a businessman. He plays guitar backup for traditional fiddlers and in his younger days used to dance himself when he wasn't playing. There's a dance at one small town or another in the area nearly every Saturday evening. "In traditional square dancing," McCann says, "the music is always live."

McCann arranged for me to spend a day in Ava, Missouri, with Bob Holt (above), who has played fiddle for four generations of Ozark dancers with his own band, called the State of the Ozarks. Holt's music is faster than that played by other dance fiddlers, and theirs is faster than anything that comes from records played in modern Western square dancing. McCann had warned me that Holt's music was "nearly pagan." It does have a pounding, insistent, pulsing quality to it. It is compelling, sensual music that makes feet, including mine, dance all by themselves. Small wonder that waiting members of a traditional square dance "jig" before they come to their turn. Jigging is a kind of double shuffle to the beat of the music, and Ozark dancers develop individual styles of jigging.

Holt is a 65-year-old cattle farmer who looks a little like Abraham Lincoln without a beard. When I ask him about the emphasis he gives to the beat, he says: "My father started me playing. He was a dancer, not a fiddle

Sue Hubbell wrote on the annual butterfly census last June. Her first book, Country Year: Living the Questions, *was recently reissued by Random House.*

Sisters-in-law Nelda (left) and Lillian Gaston take a break during Saturday night dance at Fosters Outback.

The action is lively on Fosters' hardwood floor, but never rowdy. Drinking is prohibited; food is potluck.

player, but he could whistle tunes and he always insisted that I play so there'd be a place to put his foot down. And that's the way I still play."

I ask McCann how the traditional dancers he knows feel about modern Western square dancing. "I've heard them say, 'Oh we don't mind that kind of walking,'" he says with a smile.

According to folklorist Friedland, square dancing has its roots in northern European dances such as the English country dance and the French quadrille. The familiar "do-si-do," for instance, is a corruption of the French expression for "back to back," *dos à dos.*

By the 1700s there were dancing masters in the Colonial United States who taught the latest European steps to the privileged few. As settlers moved westward, out to the Appalachian hills and beyond, they took dancing with them but not the dancing masters. They modified and changed the music and style, incorporating tunes and dance steps from different traditions, often inventing new ones. Villages were isolated, and so dancing, music and calls grew to be different in different places—and still are today, in traditional square dancing.

During the early part of this century, folk dancing became a fixture in many public schools. Progressive educators believed it was a good way to channel students' energies and teach them about other cultures. Initially, folk dancing meant European folk dancing, not American square dancing.

One of those much taken with the folk-dance movement was a man named Lloyd Shaw, who in the 1930s was the superintendent of a school district in central Colorado. Shaw, something of a showman, had created a folk-dance demonstration team with youngsters in his schools. At a fair one day, he saw callers putting on a square dance, something he'd never seen before. Told that it was a kind of American folk dancing, Shaw added it to his dancers' repertoire. In time he changed it to make it more interesting to watch. He developed new figures, had the boys pick up the girls to swing them, developed costumes to represent frontier dress and brought all the dancers into simultaneous action.

Shaw's troupe became popular throughout the country and performed at the National Folk Festival in Washington, D.C. in 1940. He began holding workshops and summer camps to teach others how to train dancers and remained active in square dancing until his death in 1958. "Pappy" Shaw, as he was known, is regarded by many as the father of modern Western square dancing. The Lloyd Shaw Dance Archives in Albuquerque, New Mexico, houses 50,000 square-dance-related items. I ask

Joan Iverson and James Ventenbergs, who met square dancing, take vows onstage at Birmingham convention.

its director, William Litchman, what Shaw, if he were alive today, would think of the modern Western square dancing he helped to create. "I think he would find much to disapprove of in the club dancing—the rigid rules, the long periods of lessons, the costumes," Litchman says. "But on the other hand, he would approve of it as an activity that brings people together."

Square dancing became especially popular in the late 1940s partly because people were moving a lot after World War II and it was a good way for couples to make new friends. But people who learned how to dance in one part of the country couldn't follow the calls somewhere else because the calls were different. Bob Osgood, a Californian, had for years been interested in dancing and taught classes in square dancing; in 1948 he decided to start a magazine called *Sets in Order*, the first slick national square-dance magazine. Its aim was to standardize dance moves, modify them for older dancers and discuss proper square-dance attire.

Osgood also helped establish the Square Dance Hall of Fame (now located at the Shaw Archives), and in the 1970s some members of that group set up Callerlab, a business to teach the basic calls and techniques. Based in Rochester, Minnesota, Callerlab is today the international organization for 3,000 professional callers. "When we started it, we designed it to oversee the teaching of 50 basic calls," Osgood says. "Now there are thousands of calls. There are people, of course, who think we've lost in quality what we've made up in quantity."

My registration form had advised me that "proper square-dance attire and convention badges are REQUIRED for entrance to the National Square Dance Convention." Even at 6 A.M. the hotel breakfast room is filled with dancers in full kit. There is an art to sitting down in a 140-yard petticoat, and the women manage it with aplomb. In hotel corridors, in elevators, in auditorium seats, I am buffeted by petticoats. Petticoats everywhere. To the outsider, the costumes of modern Western square dancers are the most striking thing about them. At the convention, standardized patterns and colors identify dancers by club or by state. Red-and-white outfits mean Alabama. Brown skirts with sunflowers indicate Kansas. Japan has sent a contingent (calls are learned in English throughout the world), and its members are dressed in costumes that seem to have been cut from American flags.

Uniforms aside, however, much of the square-dance attire here is wildly individualistic. A flame-haired woman from Texas shows me the zillion orange sequins she has sewn on her orange petticoat. I drift into the vendor area, a popular shopping mall of square-dance paraphernalia. Supplies, says Maine resident Allan Foster, president of the National Association of Square and Round Dance Suppliers, generate about $10 million in sales nationwide each year. He and the 85 other vendors present will do a significant percentage of their annual business right here.

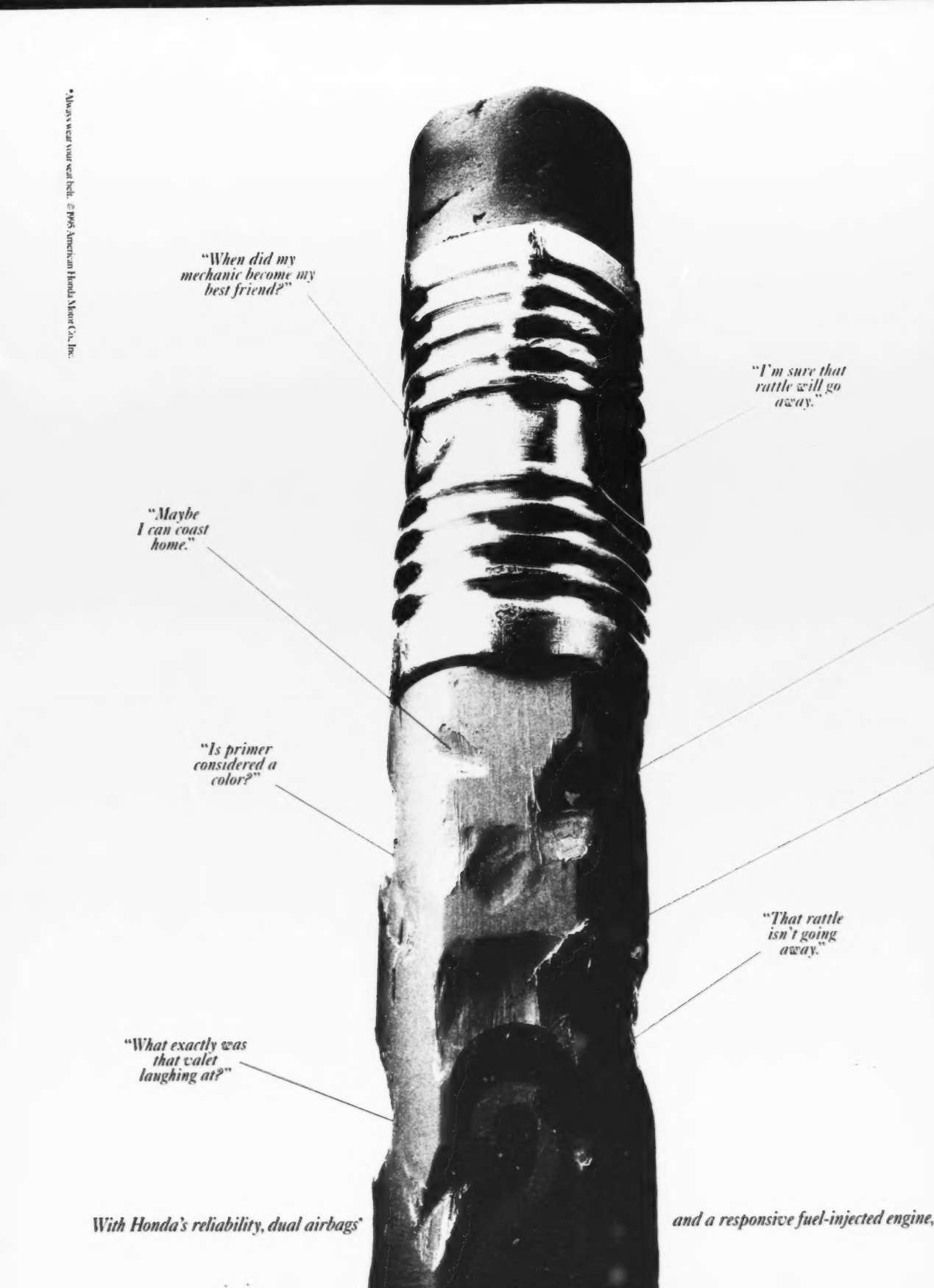
There is a lot of stuff. Dresses, blouses, slacks, shirts, bolo ties. Petticoats in rainbow colors everywhere. Jackets, records, sound systems. I talk to Bill Heyman, the owner of Supreme Audio in Marlborough, New Hampshire, the largest supplier of modern Western square-dancing records. He tells me the most popular tunes range from gospel music to rock'n'roll. Even that old standby of traditional square dancing, "Turkey in the Straw," is sometimes played for modern Western dances. "But 'God Bless America' is the greatest square-dancing hit of all time," Heyman says—which just goes to show you that in the modern Western approach, the music has almost nothing to do with the dancing.

Square-dance organizations are working hard these days to recruit new members and interest younger folks because many people come to square dancing as a retirement activity. One enthusiastic group of mostly younger dancers is forming new clubs at a rapid rate. These are the gay dancers who organize under the banner of the International Association of Gay Square Dance Clubs. According to executive administrator Karl Jaeckel, who is in charge of a booth at the convention, there are 49 gay square-dance clubs nationwide with

2,500 members, and their numbers are increasing. Their dress code is casual. Many gay dancers, men and women alike, learn both the "boy" and "girl" parts and can dance either role. Jaeckel tells me he dances at the Advanced and the Challenge levels, and when I see him in action later in the day, his face is serious as he listens for calls. He is a smooth and practiced dancer.

Not long before the convention draws to a close, I meet Ida and Glenn Bye from Coon Rapids, Minnesota. They are dressed in coordinated red-white-and-blue outfits. Ida is carrying Peaches, a white toy poodle who sports a blue skirt with a red petticoat, to match. Earlier I had met caller Bob White, the proprietor, with his wife, Carolyn, of a square-dance supply store in St. Louis. He told me about the demonstration group he has formed called Do Si Dogs. It consists of trained dogs, each partnered by a human square dancer. "Dogs can't back up easily, so I had to modify the calls a little," Bob explained. When I tell Peaches and her owners about Do Si Dogs, Peaches wags her tail.

Twins Lue Lewis (left) and Sue Morris, cooling their heels between dances, find that identical costumes can cause problems. "Callers get confused," says Morris, "and guys get lost because they can't tell us apart."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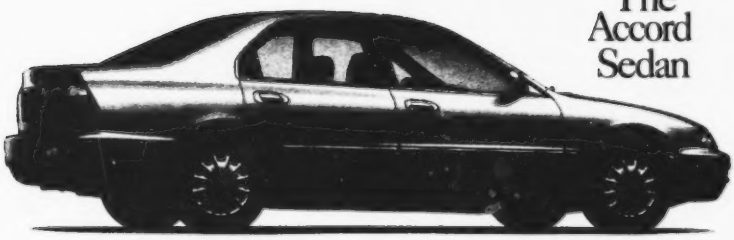

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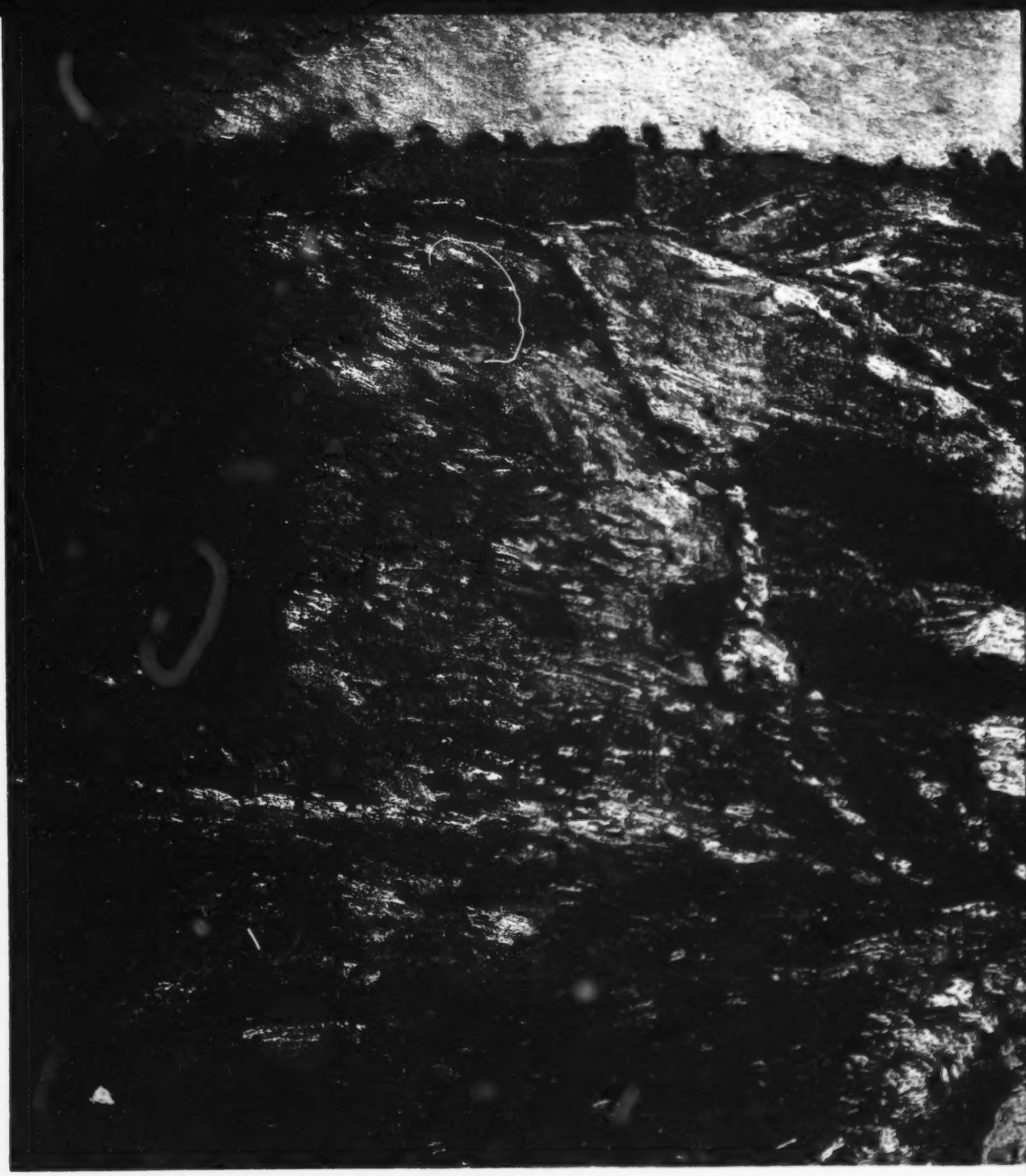


By Patricia O'Toole

Walk this trail to see what inspired the American Impressionist painters

A visit to the Weir farm in Connecticut led Childe Hassam to paint *Road to the Land of Nod* in 1910.

Bought on a whim for the price of a painting, J. Alden Weir's farm, now a National Historic Site, became a place to redefine American art

In the summer of 1882 an up-and-coming portrait painter named J. Alden Weir sent his bride-to-be a surprising piece of news from New York. He had just bought a painting for $560, and when he showed it to an art collector, the collector had made him an enticing proposition: if Weir would sell him the painting, he would pay Weir the $560 and give him a 153-acre farm in Branchville, Connecticut.

A month later, the town records show, Weir paid the collector $10 and took possession of the farm.

Nothing is known of the $560 or the painting, but the farm has proved to have a worth transcending price. It inspired Weir to take up landscape painting, and in experimenting with new styles for his new subjects, he became one of the masters of American Impressionism. His friends and fellow Impressionists Childe Hassam and John Henry Twachtman also came to the farm to paint, as did Albert Pinkham Ryder, genius of darkness and dread. Weir died in 1919, but his descendants and their artist friends have lived and created at the farm ever since. His daughter Dorothy married a sculptor, Mahonri Young, who worked there from 1932 until his death in 1957. The Youngs' friends Sperry and Doris Andrews, both painters, have occupied Weir's house since 1958. In 1990, after more than a decade of campaigning led by local citizens who believed the farm was a chapter of American cultural history worth preserving, Congress made it part of the national park system.

The Weir Farm National Historic Site offers a rare opportunity to watch a national park in the making and an even rarer opportunity to step into the world of an artist. "Weir Farm is the only intact home, studio and landscape of American Impressionism, and the landscape was critical to the painting produced here," says park superintendent Sarah Olson. The home of 19th-century sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens in Cornish, New Hampshire, is the only other national park devoted to the life of an artist.

The life of Julian Alden Weir began on August 30, 1852, in West Point, New York. The 13th of 16 children, he grew up in a household filled with art and artists. His father, Robert W. Weir, was a painter of sufficient distinction to win a commission to paint a mural, *The Embarkation of the Pilgrims*, for the rotunda of the U.S. Capitol. Robert Weir also taught drawing at the United States Military Academy. Among the cadets who polished their draftsmanship in his classes were Ulysses S. Grant, William Tecumseh Sherman, Stonewall Jackson and James Abbott McNeill Whistler.

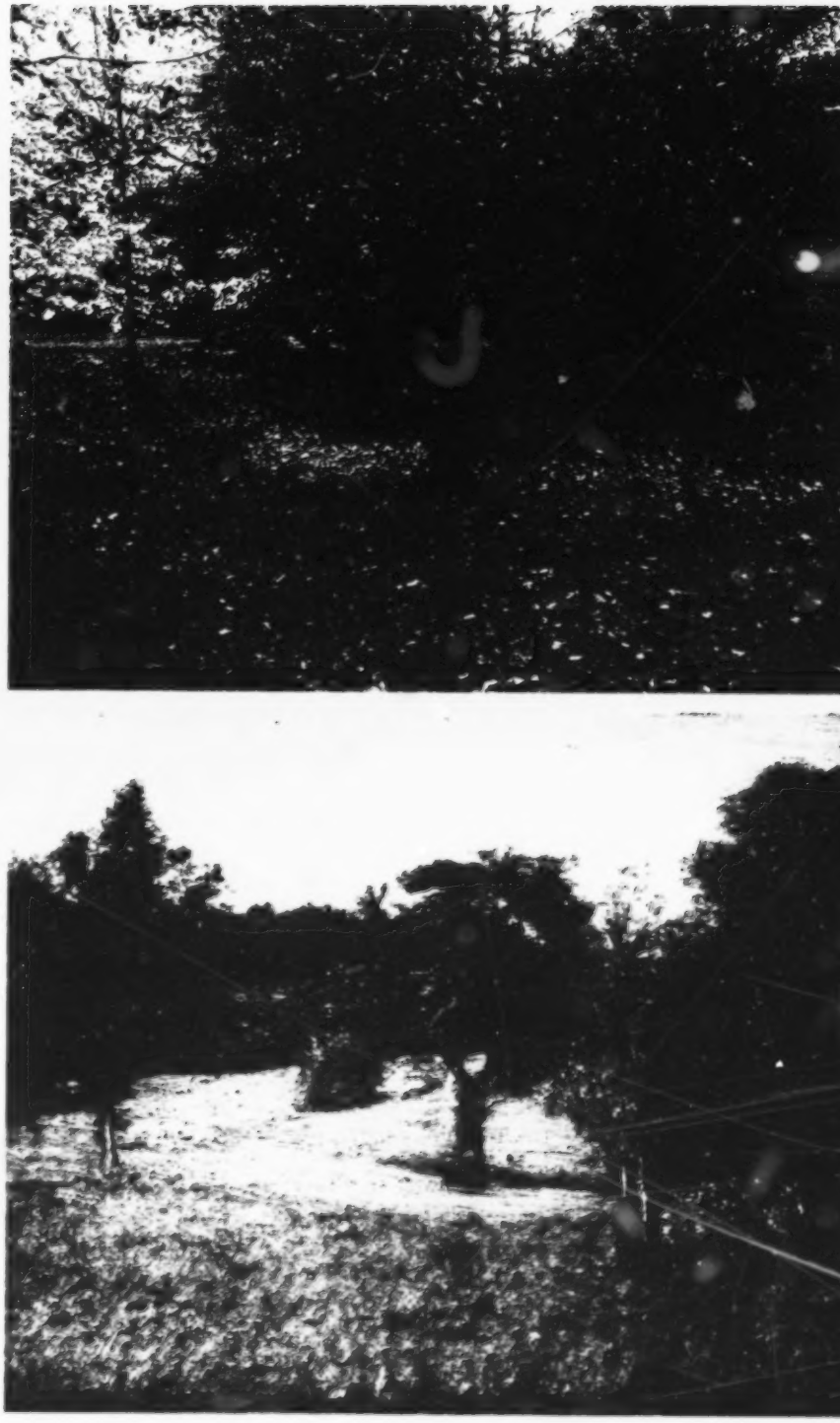
As a boy, Julian hunted and fished along the Hudson River. He also painted, drew and talked about art with his father and older half-brother, John Ferguson Weir, a future painter and the first director of the Yale School of Fine Arts.

At 18, Julian began studying at the National Academy

Photographs by Michael Melford

1620

Weir Farm has not changed much since J. Alden and Anna Weir first lured their artist friends out to the country in the 1880s. Among frequent visitors were Childe Hassam, John Henry Twachtman and Albert Pinkham Ryder. Photographs at top show the farm as it looks today. Below them are paintings of the same scenes, done more than a century ago. They are, from the left, *Weir's Orchard*, painted in the late 1880s by Ryder; *In the Livingroom*, a portrait of Anna by Weir in about 1890; and, also by Weir, *The Laundry* (1894), with a view of the main house. Modern-day visitors to the farm can now carry a brochure along a mowed path and compare 12 artworks with the scenes that inspired them.



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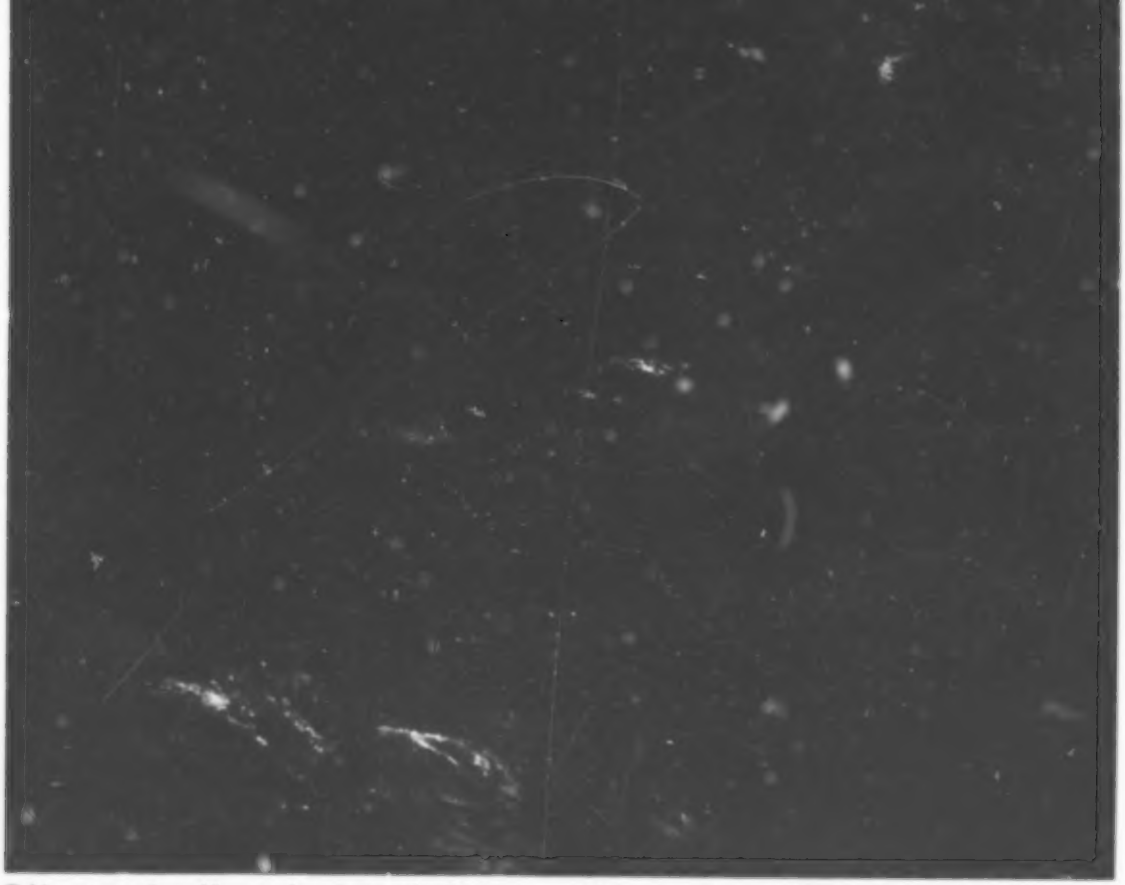


Taking a page from Monet, who often worked in his houseboat-studio at Giverny, Weir had his "Palace Car" (shown here in a painting by him). A portable outdoor studio complete with stove, it sat on long runners.

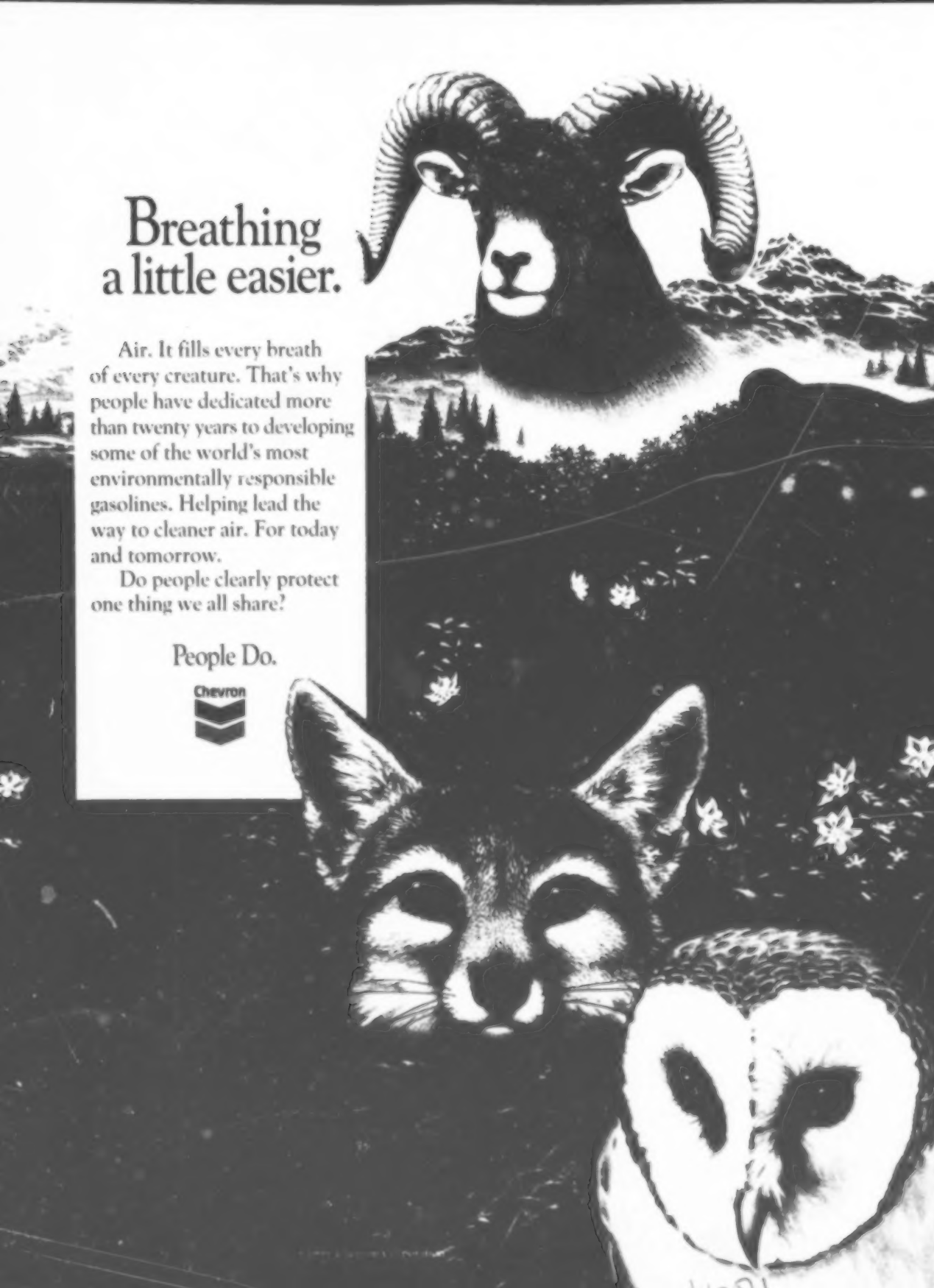
of Design in New York City, and at 21, he went off to Paris to train under Jean-Léon Gérôme at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Four years later, nearing the end of his stay, he had his first encounter with Impressionism: "I went across the river the other day to see an exhibition of the work of a new school which call themselves 'Impressionalists,'" he wrote his parents in the spring of 1877. "I never in my life saw more horrible things. . . . They do not observe drawing nor form but give you an impression of what they call nature. It was worse than the Chamber of Horrors. I was there about a quarter of an hour and left with a head ache, but I told the man exactly what I thought. One franc entrée. I was mad for two or three days, not only having paid the money but for the demoralizing effect it must have on many."

The outburst was memorable not only because Weir eventually embraced Impressionism but also because it was at odds with his usually sweet temper. Easygoing and gentle, he made friends everywhere.

When Weir returned from Paris, he rented a studio in Greenwich Village and began seeking commissions for portraits and giving painting lessons. Although teaching robbed him of time for his own work, it brought interesting pupils, including Frederic Remington, whose depictions of the American West would mythologize the cowboy, and Anna Baker, a beautiful 19-year-old with violets tucked in her belt. Weir waited as long as he could—three weeks—and proposed.

Julian and Anna married in 1883, stayed for several weeks at the farm and then sailed for Europe. They came home early partly because Julian was worried about money but also, he said, because they were lonely for "the quiet plain little house among the rocks" in Branchville. They settled into a routine of living at the farm from spring until late fall and spending the rest of the year in Manhattan. In the New York art world of the 1880s, Weir enjoyed the respect of the old guard and the affection of Ryder, Twachtman and other young artists heading in more daring directions. In addition to doing commissioned portraits, Weir often painted his wife, sometimes with the first of their four children, Caroline, who was born in 1884.

Some of these family paintings were done at Branchville, but before 1889 Weir rarely painted the farm itself.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His shift to landscapes and a more suggestive style, with the light palette and broken brushstrokes of the Impressionists, seems to have grown out of a frustration with old approaches. "Traditions are good things and interesting," he told his half-brother, John, but he felt the conventions of the day had misled him into trying to "see through the eyes of greater men" rather than to explore the "character and aspect" that interested him most. "I was hampered by trying to render the things I did not see and unable to get at the things that really existed." A critic derided the "spinach-like texture" of Weir's brushwork, and patrons of the gallery that showed his new pictures refused to buy. He was undaunted. "My eyes, I feel have been opened to a big truth and whether or not I can develop in that direction I know not, but one thing I do know is that painting has a greater charm to me than ever before."

Eager not to miss a day of painting outdoors at the farm, Weir in 1890 designed a little portable studio, a hut on runners. Grandly dubbed the "Palace Car," it could be dragged by oxen to wherever he wanted to paint. Windows in all four walls gave him views in every direction. A stove kept out the cold.

The idyll was broken only twice: in 1889 by the death of his infant son, Julian, and in 1892, when Anna, then 29, died after giving birth to their third daughter. The following year he married Ella Baker, Anna's sister, who had been caring for the Weir children since their mother's death.

Weir painted more than 200 pictures at the farm, and together they form a portrait of his contentment. Warm, contemplative, domestic, they show sunny pastures, boulders, a stand of birches, the flower garden and his pond, which he built with a $2,500 prize from the Boston Art Club. Like Weir himself, the paintings are soft-spoken, engaging the viewer more by invitation than command. His son-in-law, Mahonri Young, noted that Weir's paintings had no "tempests and few storms."

He liked to paint until 3:30 in the afternoon and then head for the woods to hunt. His partridge, quail and woodcock regularly turned up on the dinner table; the farm, worked by a caretaker, produced livestock and grain. It also kept the family in potatoes, apples and cider. Weir's life at the farm, said John Singer Sargent, was "the finest life I have ever seen."

Weir's friend John Henry Twachtman followed him to Connecticut in 1886, renting several houses before settling in Greenwich. Their rural isolation was "a fine thing," Twachtman told Weir, because it put an artist "nearer to nature." Like Weir, Twachtman was a seeker of private essences. He narrowed his color range to highlight the geometry of his compositions and often left out the horizon to focus the eye on a small scene. He also painted the same waterfalls and brooks again and again, hoping to come closer to their truths.

On first seeing Impressionist works, Weir, here at the farm, compared them to the "Chamber of Horrors."

Twachtman was a regular at the farm and, after 1890, so was the effervescent Childe Hassam (SMITHSONIAN, December 1990), whose bold colors make his work more immediately accessible than Weir's and Twachtman's. When Hassam came to Branchville, he and Weir were inseparable. They painted all day in the fields and played dominoes deep into the night. Enchanted by the farm's address, Nod Hill Road, Hassam turned this piece of serendipity into a green reverie he called *Road to the Land of Nod*.

Weir had a special fondness for the reclusive Albert Pinkham Ryder (SMITHSONIAN, May 1990), who painted the terrors of death, witches and Jonah's ordeal with the whale. Weir lured Ryder to Branchville by outfitting a guest room with an exterior door, enabling him to slip in and out without meeting anyone. On one visit, Ryder

The author lives a few miles from Weir Farm. Her book, The Five of Hearts, *which was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize, was excerpted in the June 1990 issue.*

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Sarah Olson, superintendent of Weir Farm, stands in front of one of the recently restored garden gates.

managed an almost cheery painting of Weir's orchard. Grateful as Ryder was for Weir's hospitality, however, he confessed after one visit that he preferred walking the city at night to drowsy afternoons of fishing in the pond: "Catching mice is more in my line, and they are shivery looking enough for me."

At the end of 1897, Weir, Hassam, Twachtman and seven other established painters seceded from the Society of American Artists and organized as the Ten American Painters. They meant to go quietly, wanting nothing more than the opportunity to exhibit together, away from the hodgepodge that the society's big annual exhibition had become. But the split set off charges and countercharges, and "That Row among Artists," as one newspaper called it, was the talk of New York for weeks.

Although The Ten's first show, held in April 1898, met with enthusiasm, the eight canvases shown by J. Alden Weir did not. "They touch the sympathies lightly, and then, in some curious way, they leave one cold," said one critic. Others have felt likewise, put off by the roughness of the artist's deliberately rudimentary forms. But as the painter's daughter Dorothy Weir Young observed in *The Life and Letters of J. Alden Weir*, Weir cannot be appreciated unless he is approached on his own terms: "He disliked having everything taken in at a glance, preferring instead that things should disclose themselves gradually, when one was least expecting it."

The Weir Farm National Historic Site discloses itself as gradually as the paintings. Perched atop a hill on a quiet country road, it first seems to be a classic New England farm—a collection of barns and houses in dark red with white trim, all neatly set in pastures crisscrossed with stone walls. Only a walk around the grounds reveals that two of the "barns" are studios, one built by Weir, the other by Mahonri Young. (A grandson of Brigham Young's, Mahonri is best known for *This Is the Place*, an ensemble of 20-foot bronze figures and basreliefs marking the spot overlooking the valley of the Great Salt Lake where Brigham Young decided the Mormons would settle.) Weir's beloved pond is invisible to passers-by, reachable only by a footpath through the woods. "People who come to Weir Farm discover the place on their own," says Gay Vietzke, chief of visitor services. "My sense is that that's what Weir wanted." (Open Monday through Friday during the winter, the farm will open seven days a week after April 1.)

The park owes its existence to neighbors and friends who formed the Weir Farm Heritage Trust and staved off suburbanizing bulldozers. To succeed, they had to win the support of preservation groups, the towns of Ridgefield and Wilton, the state of Connecticut and, ultimately, Congress. The National Historic Site occupies 60 acres, which are adjoined by 113 acres owned by the Nature Conservancy, 86 acres by the state and 33 acres set aside as open space by the town of Ridgefield. (Branchville, little more than a railroad stop, is part of both Ridgefield and Wilton.)

Horticulturists, environmentalists, archaeologists and specialists in the preservation of buildings and landscapes have worked with Superintendent Olson to plan the park's future, assess the condition of the buildings and the natural resources, and inventory the contents of Weir's studio and other buildings. A recent find: a pair of big wooden runners that may have been the underpinnings of the Palace Car. One of the first additions for the public was a painting-sites trail. Brochure in hand, visitors can follow a mowed path and compare reproductions of 12 paintings with the scenes that inspired them.

"Don't stop now. Keep the art alive"

Park rangers keep pastels and sketch pads handy for visitors who want to draw but arrive unequipped. People also come to picnic, bird, fish and hike. "In the early stages of developing a general management plan, we invited artists, art historians and art educators to workshops so we could find out how they thought the site should be used," says Marjorie Smith, a landscape architect and park planner who works in the National Park Service regional office in Boston. "The artists told us, 'This site has inspired artists for over a hundred years. Don't stop now. Don't make it a museum piece. Keep the art alive.'" That conviction has generated art classes, a lecture series, school field trips and the creation of a visiting artists program, which is administered by the Weir Farm Heritage Trust.

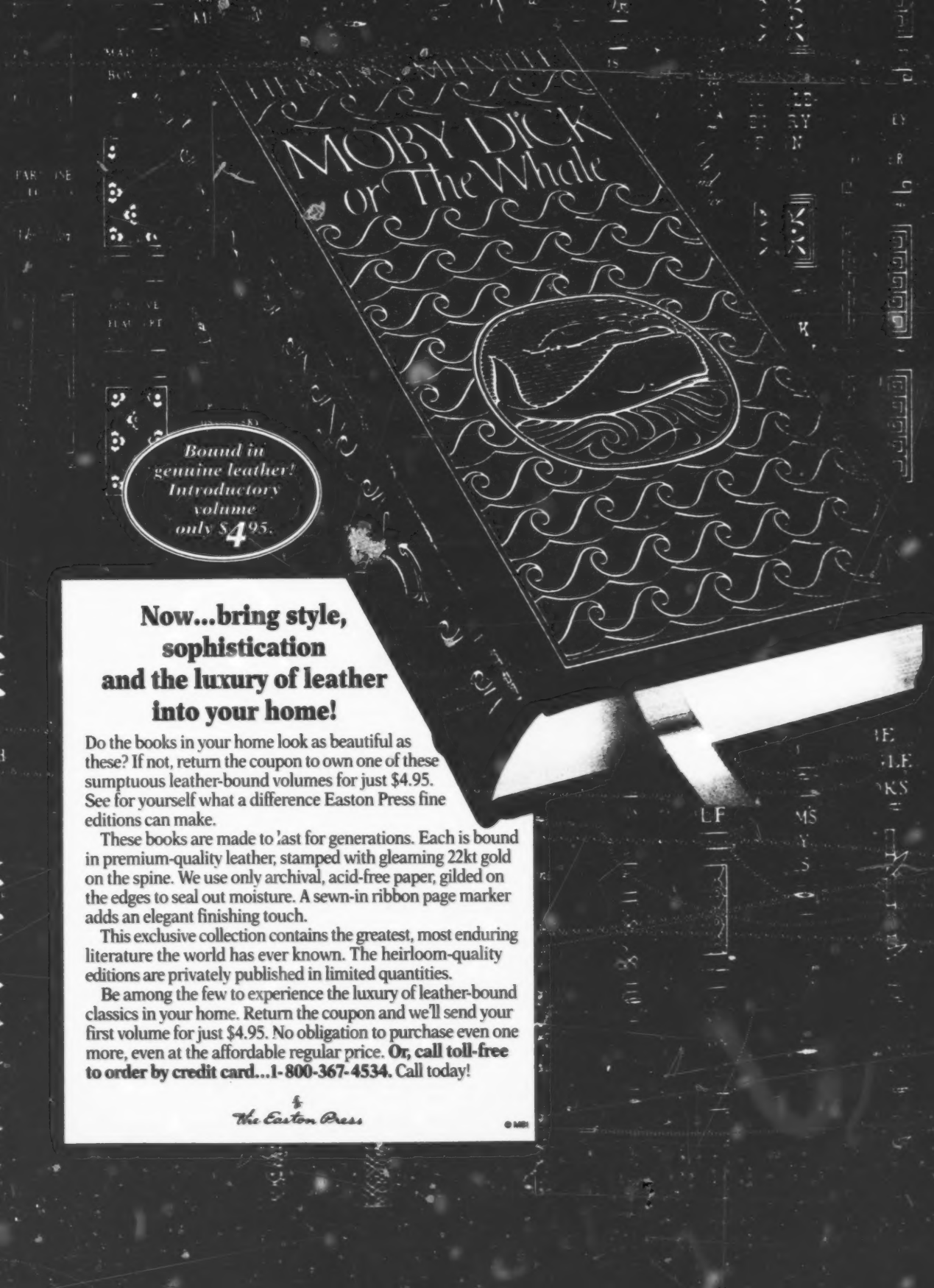
The only thing noticeably scarce at Weir Farm is the artwork of J. Alden Weir. "We think it's important to have an art collection here because there is nowhere

else in the country for the public to see the art and its landscape together," Olson says. "But we don't have the security or the temperature and humidity controls that museums can provide. And the money for the collection will have to come from private sources because the legislation that created the Weir Farm National Historic Site prohibits us from spending federal funds on art." Fundraising for a collection will be led by the trust.

Volunteers from the Ridgefield Garden Club are restoring the farm's flower garden, untended for decades and overrun with trees. "The sundial was missing, the pedestal was crumbling, the arbor gates were gone," says Eliot Foulds, one of the historical landscape architects brought in as consultants from the National Park Service's Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation in Brookline, Massachusetts. "We removed the nonhistoric trees and looked at old photographs to determine what had actually grown there. To identify climbing vines, we took the photos to experts at the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University." The garden was replanted in 1995 with flowers found in the photographs, including moss roses, phlox, asters, peonies, lilies, irises, coreopsis, delphiniums and cosmos. The garden club is also restoring the boxwood ring that grew around the fountain. The old ring could not be saved, but it provided cuttings for propagating a new one.

There is a soul-satisfying symmetry in the fact that the quaint, plain little house among the rocks has so many friends. An excellent friend himself, Weir once saw Albert Pinkham Ryder through a hard time by selling a painting Ryder had given him and passing along the proceeds. When John Henry Twachtman died at 49, it was Weir who organized a sale of Twachtman's work that raised $16,610 for his family. "You can feel his warmth here," says park planner Marjorie Smith. "I think that's why so many people have helped care for the place." J. Alden Weir led a fine life, as John Singer Sargent said. Thanks to his new friends, it goes on.

The legendary warmth of J. Alden Weir permeates his studio, still filled with his tools and brushes. The three paintings at left are Weir's only works at the farm, but supporters are hoping to change that.



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By Bruce Watson

A Freedom Summer activist becomes a math revolutionary

In the Algebra Project, Robert Moses uses subway rides, gumdrops and everyday experiences to help kids cope with exponents and negative numbers

On a warm Saturday morning in spring, a bunch of rowdy sixth-graders take over a gymnasium in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Shouting, daring, flashing their white tennis shoes, teams warm up, then take their best shots in an elimination tournament. The Longfellow School edges the Agassiz School in a tough game, then faces the King Open School for the title. Parents, coaches, teachers, fans, are up and screaming as the lead goes back and forth. Then, in the final minute, King Open huddles up and runs a pattern play across the gym floor. Whipping out their pens, they factor numbers from 1 to 200 into primes and tape their answers to a matrix spread on the hardwood floor. Referees shout "Correct!" and King Open storms off the bench with the city championship . . . in algebra.

Across the country, abstract math is hitting the concrete. From Chicago's South Side, students ride the El downtown, turning the trip into a number line of positive and negative integers. In Indianapolis, students give a two-hour algebra workshop for their parents. In Boston, kids who once groaned through math now get introduced to the concepts of algebra at an early age. In each city, the common denominator is the Algebra Project, the mission of a man who knows both math and movements.

The last time Bob Moses organized a movement, he was called a Communist and an "outside agitator." His cause then was as basic as 2 + 2. He wanted everyone to vote. But this was Mississippi in 1961, where whole counties with black majorities had no registered black voters, and there were those who would seemingly stop at noth-

Photographs by Ron Ceasar

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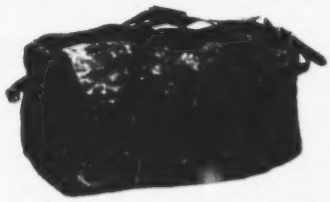

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In a combined relay race and math contest, Brinkley Middle School sixth-graders solve a problem, run to the board, run back to teammates.

ing to keep it that way. During three explosive years, Moses' serenity in the face of beatings and arrests made him a legend in the civil rights movement. In 1964 his tactical organizing made history during Freedom Summer, which focused national attention on Mississippi's "closed society." But when he left "the movement," Moses took up his old job: teaching math.

Now Bob Moses is organizing again. His goal is to help kids meet new demands for successful citizenship. "The idea of citizenship now requires not only a reading-writing tool, but a math-science tool," Moses told members of the Mathematical Association of America in Washington, D.C. "Math literacy and economic access are how we are going to give hope to the young generation."

Since 1982, when Moses won a "genius grant" from the MacArthur Foundation, the Algebra Project has been lifting students onto the launching pad toward college-prep math. It now reaches some 45,000 sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders in 105 schools in inner cities and the rural South. The project's aim is to open up the access to an exclusive club. Only 11 percent of all high school students climb math's ladder from algebra through calculu Moses notes. The rest, ready or n enter a high-tech economy where mi imal math can equal a minimum-wa job. "Every school needs to focus how to put a floor under all student he says. "In the Algebra Project we fine the floor as preparation to do c lege-prep math. That doesn't mea every student will go to college, b every student should be ready."

To the Arabs who helped advance algebra provided a means of grappli with unknowns. The word itself mea "the uniting of broken parts to resto a whole." But for Moses' young st dents, his project is part algebra, pa alchemy. It turns ratios into recipes f lemonade and transforms the slippe ness of exponents into the stickiness gumdrops. Many school progra offer hands-on activities, but the A gebra Project, like Moses himself, rooted in logic, experience and gra roots democracy.

At the Brinkley Middle School Jackson, Mississippi, Bob Moses stan in a classroom with bags of gumdro in his hands. The seventh-graders b fore him know little of his role in h tory. To them, he is Mr. Moses or M

ob, the teacher who lets them play at
ath. Only when they switch to history
ill they learn how the man with the
ath games risked his life to open
eir society.

Down in Mississippi in 1961, few had
een anyone like Bob Moses. As field
ecretary for the Student Non-Violent
oordinating Committee, he was shy
et frank, absolutely fearless, utterly
elf-assured. In Liberty, leading two
en to the registrar of voters, Moses
as beaten with a knife handle. Bleed-
ng heavily, he got the men to the regis-
ar, then pressed charges, something
lacks just didn't do in Mississippi's
closed society." Word soon spread
mong civil rights workers. Though he
ore bib overalls, this Moses had a
aster's in philosophy from Harvard.
I just didn't understand what kind of
uy this Bob Moses is," a SNCC worker
aid after Moses nonchalantly took a
ap in an office just ransacked by a
ob, "so I guess I was learning."

Raised in Harlem, Moses won schol-
rships to competitive high schools
nd college in the 1950s. He entered
arvard's doctoral program in philos-
phy, then dropped out because of his
other's death and his father's illness.
ut in 1960, while teaching math at
he Horace Mann School in New York,
e read of sit-ins at segregated lunch
ounters in North Carolina. "They
ere kids my age, and I knew this had
omething to do with my own life," he
emembers. Moses spent the next sum-
er in Georgia, working with veteran
rganizers like Ella Baker. Following
nother year of teaching, he went
outh again and stayed for three years.

Three decades later, Moses is back
n Mississippi, testing Algebra Project
ctivities for seventh-graders. In the
lassroom, as in the line of fire during
is hot summers here, Moses, now 61,
s somber, serene, riveted to his task.
Though his name may be Moses, he
as the patience of Job. Faced with ten
tudents behaving like random num-

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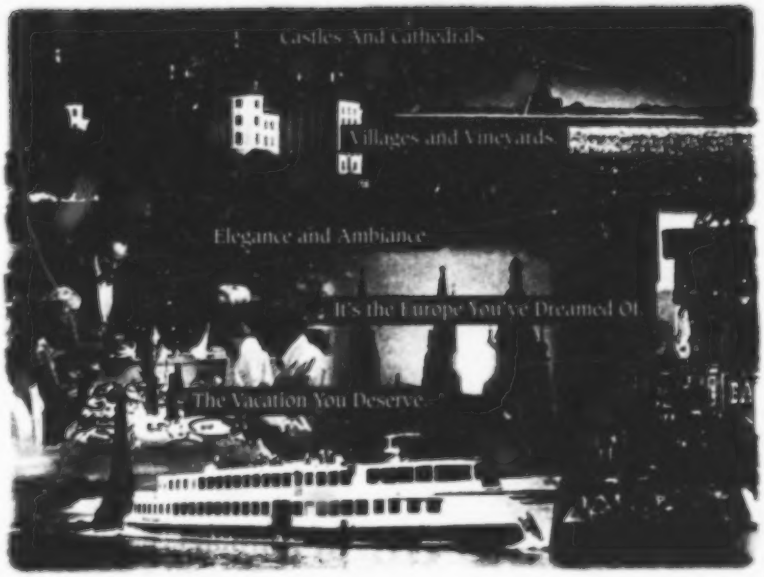

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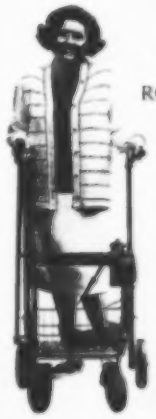

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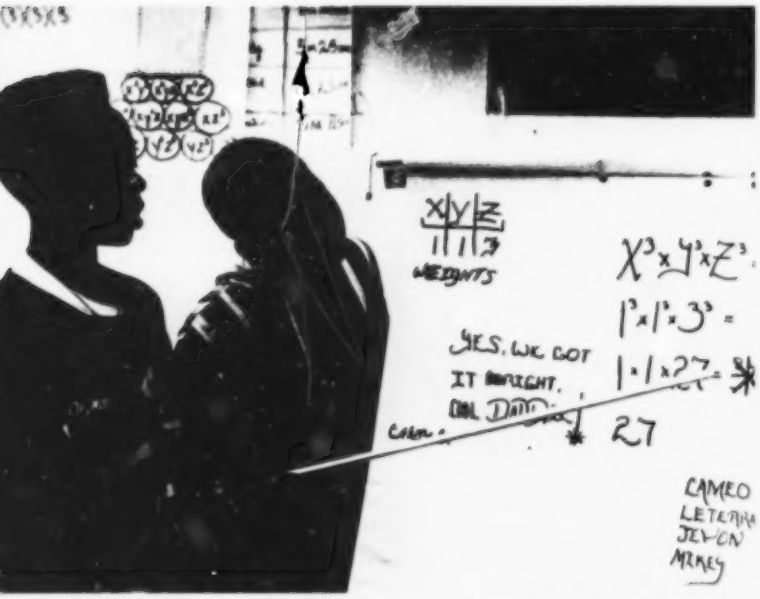
bers, he calms them with his presence, speaking so softly that, as one Freedom Summer volunteer recalls of his manner all those years ago, "he seemed to be addressing each one separately, though talking to no one at all."

"Now you remember we agreed that there's no learning unless you decide you're going to learn something," he tells the students. "If you have another agenda, you can't learn the math." He pauses, staring until the walls themselves seem sobered and ready to learn. "All right, can we begin?"

Few math teachers demonstrate exponents with gumdrops, but Moses is a prime number among teachers, divisible only by himself. Stressing that the candy he is passing out is for "mathematical purposes only," Moses begins constructing concepts in youthful minds. He sticks one toothpick between two gumdrops, then sets it aside. He builds a toothpick-gumdrop square, then a cube. If $a = 1$, he explains, the single toothpick is simply a. So what would the 1 x 1 square be? Students guess for a minute until one shouts "a^2!" And the cube, a x a x a, is? "a^3!" someone shouts. He makes other models—a rectangle, 1 x 2 toothpicks, a rectangular solid, 1 x 1 x 2. If the two-toothpick side is called b, then the rectangle will be? "a x b!" After further discussion, Moses sets students free to build their own models of these "algebra forms." When the bell rings, a few gumdrops have mysteriously disappeared. But for 45 minutes, kids have created models for the exponents they will use every day in algebra.

Shortly after a handful of teachers introduced the Algebra Project at Brinkley, principal Ken Acton noticed a hole in his morning schedule. The same tough kids sent to him day after day for cutting up were no longer in his office during math class. "I see almost no one from the Algebra Project for disciplinary reasons," Acton says. "They're too busy with the activities." He estimates that discipline problems in the project's classes have dropped by 90 percent. The Project's other numbers are equally encouraging. In 1992 only 22 of 200 Brinkley eighth-graders took algebra. This fall, as the Project's first veterans move into eighth grade, 130 out of the 160 members of the class will be headed through algebra's gate toward higher math. Acton points proudly to the school's annual Achievement Tests, where project veterans scored 13 na-

Mariama Gibbs (left) and Erica Thomas explain a display to teacher Lynne Godfrey at a workshop where faculty evaluated the students' success.



After working out a solution to a problem, seventh-graders Calvin Cain and Michael McLaurin explain to their classmates exactly how they went about it.

ional percentile points higher in math han nonveterans. "With a common xperience at the root of their lessons, hildren are not disadvantaged be- ause of their backgrounds," Acton ays. "Our kids can learn and learn ell if given the right approach."

But the Algebra Project offers no niracles. Where it has taken root, ften in inner cities, the streets are an rban grid plotted with negative num- ers—crime, poverty, dropouts. In uburbs where students have home omputers, junior high algebra is a iven. But here? Yes, Moses says. Espe- ially here. "In the '60s everyone said harecroppers were apathetic, that hey didn't want to vote," he says after lass. "It wasn't until we got them de- anding to vote that we got attention. Here, where kids are falling wholesale hrough the cracks—or chasms—

dropping out of sight, becoming fod- er for jails, people say they don't want o learn. The only ones who can dispel hat notion are the kids themselves. We have to get them to demand what veryone says they don't want."

Making kids clamor for algebra is not as simple as solving for *x*. And moving students from arithmetic into algebra's unknowns can't be done overnight. Despite its name, the Aigebra Project is really a pre-algebra project, supplementing regular math in the sixth and seventh grades. Its students may still learn fractions and decimals using traditional texts. But they may also spend several days, even weeks, in their new Algebra Project workbooks.

Based on a "five-step curricular process," the Project opens each lesson with an activity—playing a game or puzzling over a problem or taking a bus or subway trip. "The trip becomes an event, or step one," Moses explains. Step two gets the kids to reflect on the event. They may write stories about it, or draw pictures, or just talk it over. Step three involves breaking the event down into component parts, or "features": for a trip, this includes things like "start," "finish," "direction" and "stops along the way." In step four, students start assigning symbols to the features they've identified. By step five, the symbols have become part of their conversation, part of what Moses

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